

Winter, Spring, Summer, Fall by [returntosaturn](#)

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Language: English

Characters: Dustin Henderson, Eleven (Stranger Things), Jim "Chief" Hopper, Joyce Byers, Lucas Sinclair, Max (Stranger Things), Mike Wheeler, Will Byers

Relationships: Eleven & Mike Wheeler, Eleven/Mike Wheeler, Max & Lucas Sinclair, Max/Lucas Sinclair

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Summary:

“What are you thinking about?”

Her attention doesn't turn from the scene outside. “Remembering this,” she says. “I hope I will always remember.”

He reaches for her hand. “The best part is, it happens every year.”

“I want to remember the first one,” she answers.

// a collection of first experiences for El during her first year in Hawkins, outside of the lab. Post Season 2

Winter, Spring, Summer, Fall

The Wheeler's tree is fluffier and wider and a lot brighter than the one in the Byers' living room.

There's no lights on the Byers' tree. Just little ceramic angels, red and green balls with little veins running over them where the paint has chipped, a snowflake Will had made in grade school out of popsicle sticks and glitter, the year 1976 painted neatly on one side.

The Wheeler's tree is strung with what Eleven guesses must be billions of lights, twinkling and blinking in a way that seems to make the whole room warm. The ornaments look like new, each placed with care. Not too crowded, no two colors beside each other. There's balls and little white birds and pretty red ribbon that reminds her of the dress Nancy wore at the Snow Ball. There's little trumpets and drums and things that look like trumpets but are round and curvy. There's even a glittery snowflake that matches Will's.

Careful, she lifts a finger to touch it. To just see the lights shine in the silvery specks...

"El?"

She jumps, pulling her hand back almost guiltily and turns. Mike is there, bundled in lumpy red and white sweater, a small box clutched between his hands.

It's wrapped in shiny red paper with a green bow on top. The paper is creased crookedly, taped heavily, wrinkled on the edges, not nice and neat like Mrs. Wheeler's packages under the tree.

"M-Merry Christmas..." he says, and glances down at the box, then holds it out towards her. "I hope you like it."

"I...didn't get you anything..." she admits quietly, tentatively. Was she meant to?

He shrugs one shoulder. "That doesn't matter..." His cheeks go pink and she catches the way it makes his freckles stand out. "Presents

don't have to be a two-way thing all the time. I got you something because...well...because...just... Here."

He deposits the box unceremoniously into her hands.

She picks gingerly at the paper, almost admiring it, wanting to remember it. She digs a finger under a ragged corner that had been taped down in an attempt to hide its tattered edge. The box inside is just plain white, square and ordinary.

She lets the wrappings fall soundlessly to the shaggy carpet and lifted the lid, revealing a thin chain nestled on a bed of fluffy white.

A little snowflake dangles from the chain, a tiny blue stone set into its center.

"Pretty," she says, blinking away the burn in her nose. Why were tears coming? She isn't sad. She feels something growing in her chest; something like she'd felt at the Snow Ball. Something she'd felt after finally being face to face with Mike after 353 days. It feels a little scary but it also feels happy, and she hopes it will stay forever.

"I know it isn't much, but I saved for it! Shoveled snow for the neighbors. Babysat Holly too," Mike declares, and she looks up to see him with his hands shoved in his pants pockets, watching her under the dark line of his curly hair.

"Its..." She thinks through the words she's been learning. Synonyms. Words that mean the same but different. It's more than pretty. It's bigger than beautiful. In fact, it isn't the necklace at all that's making her feel so warm and tingly and...home. Maybe there isn't a word.

She doesn't know how to explain it, so she snuffles against the wet welling up in her eyes and looks up at him again.

His eyes are wide and trained on her, and she can't decide if he's happy or shocked or excited or all of it at once.

"Do you...want me to put it on you?"

She nods.

She's seen women do this on TV before. In jewelry commercials where they're always giggling and blushing and happy.

(She saw a man get on one knee and give a woman a ring one time on one of the daytime shows. She wonders what that meant. What that felt like. She has a feeling Hopper wouldn't like it if she asked him).

She pushes aside the shorts curls that have grown nearly to her shoulders. She's glad to have pretty hair to brush out of the way. She waits, listening to him fiddling with the clasp until he fastens it and she touches the silver snowflake just over her heart.

"Thank you," she says, turning to face him.

"You're welcome," he answers, rushing the words out. "It looks nice on you."

She smirks and looks down at the charm, toying it between her fingers.

There isn't time to say anything more when Hopper skulks into the doorway between the kitchen and the living room, his big hat cutting a sharp shadow in the bright kitchen light.

"Time to go, kid," he says. He *always* says.

She knows there can't be a kiss. Hopper would—what was the word Max used that one time?— *flip*. She isn't sure if a hug would be ok, but Mike solves the problem for her by giving a little wave as he inches back towards the tree, further into the room and looking as if he'd like to melt into the wallpaper.

"See you later, El," he tries innocently, and looks up at the police chief only briefly before he ducks to snatch the scrap of ruined paper off the floor.

In the car, Hopper gestures towards her unenthused. "What's that thing?" He asks, and she isn't ever intimidated by his scruffy glower.

"A present," she answers simply, reaching up to touch the chain.

“Hmph,” he grumbles, then reaches for the gear shift.

“Pretty,” she hears him murmur beneath the rumble of the motor.

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Hopper is loud.

Every time he moves, he makes noise.

He’s a walking cacophony of sounds. His boots are heavy on the floorboards of his cabin, filling up the hallway with their rhythmic booming as a sign that he’s home from work.

He scrapes the spatula against the skillet at breakfast. He makes the plates clatter and slams the coffee maker with a grumble.

His jacket rustles when he walks or moves or shoves his hands in his pockets.

His lighter hisses. His car groans and grinds and rumbles almost as much as he does.

El doesn’t really mind. She likes that she can predict him, learn him, understand him. His noises remind her that he’s different—not like Papa, no matter what she said before. Not like Papa at all.

(Listens. Challenges. She’s knows he pushes; she can always tell. But she’s good at pushing back).

So its odd on Christmas morning when she wakes up to a silent house.

She knows its the day because the boys have been counting down. She knows its the day because, like Will told her when she asked, Christmas is a *feeling*.

Usually, he’s already be awake making breakfast and rummaging around.

She wakes up, toes tingly where they poke out from beneath the edge of the quilt. She snuggles deeper just for a minute, always eager to

soak up time in her very own bed.

She pulls on her socks before tip toeing to the kitchen, and begins.

She knows how to light the stove, even though she isn't technically supposed to. She's seen him cook scrambled eggs enough times to figure it out. It doesn't seem too hard. She grabs a clean drinking glass and starts to whisk until they're thick yellow, then pours them in. Coffee comes next; she fills the filter to the rim.

That'll work.

It's probably the gurgling of the machine that wakes him and pulls him down the hall, heavy feet shuffling and already murmuring groggily as he went.

"What's going on in here?" He asks, still blinking sleep from his eyes when she looks up at him from the pan, spatula in hand.

"Christmas."

She counts the emotions on his face. Confused. Sleepy. Grumpy. Then something softer she doesn't have words for just yet. Something far away she hasn't figured out how to define from her word list. The look he gets when he talks about his grandpa. Talks about Sarah.

There's a long stretch of silence. Again, the house falls quiet.

He meets her eyes, and she can still see the fringes of it. His smile is a little sad, a little careful, but his eyes glow. She thinks about the image she'd seen of Santa Claus in a picture book from the library. Red cheeks, beard, happy eyes.

"Alright, kid, lemme help."

She moves aside for him to admire her work. She expects him to grump about how she should've waited for him, or could have just made Eggos, that it's too dangerous to turn on the stove without help, but he doesn't say anything. He grabs the spatula and pokes the eggs around a bit, then glances down at her.

"Hmmm..." he murmurs, then says, "How about some biscuits? And

bacon too?”

She nods.

“Cinnamon and chocolate chips for the Eggos?”

She nods again, unable to help herself from cracking a smile.

“I think I’ll even let you try coffee.”

She perks up instantly, hurrying to grab two mugs from the cabinet.

“But only today, “ he amends. “Dont get used to it. Caffeine isn’t for kids.”

When everything’s ready and the house is full of the scent bacon that makes her stomach rumble just from the smell, they sit at the table with a feast between them. He uses towels to set the pan on, and plates a tall stack of waffles for them to share from.

“Merry Christmas, kid,” he says, and lifts his coffee mug to take a sip, then glares down into it, smacking his lips. “Jesus Christ...Did you make coffee or rocket fuel?”

She takes a drink of her own mug, unmoved.

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Ms. Byers was the only parent who’d allow six thirteen year olds to infiltrate her living room unsupervised with an endless feed of junk food, pop, and horror films on the evening of New Years Eve.

Every other parent had refused or danced around the subject until their kid bent to the inevitable, universally known meaning of the word “maybe.”

Even El knew that one.

Hopper promised them, while Ms. Byers was winding up her scarf, that they’d be back by twelve thirty, and if there was any funny business, or if anyone—he’d cut his eyes towards El—went outside under any circumstances, he’d know.

Parents gone, they convened, sprawled on the couch and the floor, bags of chips and candy wrappers and rogue bits of popcorn strewn around like land mines,

She'd lost interest in *Christine* within the first fifteen minutes, and so had wandered stealthily off to watch through the window in the dining room as snow drifted down, seeming to glow in the streetlit dark.

She senses him there before she sees Mike's hands beside hers on the windowsill.

"Hey."

"Hi."

"Do you not like the movie?"

She shook her head, looking down at his hands.

"Me neither," he said, too quickly and she watched out of the corner of her eye as he squared his shoulders.

"I like the snow," she said, gazing back out the window.

"Yeah. Pretty."

She smiles to herself.

There's a few minutes of silence, but it doesn't feel weird and she's grateful that it's always this way with him.

"What are you thinking about?"

Her attention doesn't turn from the scene outside. "Remembering this," she says. "I hope I will always remember."

He reaches for her hand. "The best part is, it happens every year."

"I want to remember the first one," she answers. And she knows he understands what she means. The first Christmas, the first New Year. The first time she truly feels like everything is different with no risk

of it going back to the way it was.

There's quiet again, and she looks up. He's smiling at her, and she inches just a little closer to rest her head on his shoulder, turning back to look out the window.

“Eleven!”

She whips around, curls flying. Lucas, Max, Will, and Dustin are silhouetted in the television glow, on their feet and chanting. Dustin counts the seconds off on his new calculator watch.

“Ten! Nine! Eight! Seven!”

They turn together, and Mike bounds over to join in. Everybody cheers as one when they reach the end of the countdown.

She looks on, watching Lucas and Dustin high-five, Will grinning and clapping mildly on the fringes, Max's wild red hair—*long hair*—catching the warm glow from the kitchen light.

Mike turns to catch her eye.

She smiles.

Author's Note:

[allscissorsallpaper](#) on Tumblr.